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ABSTRACT

A competency based learning approach as applied to public address instructional development can help to achieve the following goals: (1) to enable students to grasp the history of the period under study, (2) to enable students to develop and apply rhetorical criticism skills, (3) to provide students with a course format of high interest value, (4) to enable students to perceive the relationship between history and rhetoric, and (5) to allow students to develop research skills useful for studying other historical periods. Five learning structures can be defined in this particular approach: signal learning, chain learning, multiple discrimination, concept formation, and principle formation. To develop such a course it is important to recognize that a reciprocal relationship exists between course objectives, material selection, learning structures, and teaching tactics. A matrix analysis helps to determine whether the proposed course material is purposeful. A competency based approach gives students confidence and enables them to move beyond memorization of materials to an analysis and evaluation of the relationship of rhetoric and events. (HOD)

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Competency-Based Learning in British Public Address:

An Instructional Development Approach

A Paper

Submitted to the Editorial Board of

ERIC Speech Communication Module

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Competency-based learning is an approach that frequently has been employed in the development of instruction for basic courses in Speech Communication.[1] Little attention, however, has been directed toward the implications for the approach to the instruction of public address. The need for a new approach to instructional development in this area is apparent when observing the increasing trend in many universities to emphasize skills-oriented undergraduate courses. Public address scholars consistently have recognized and employed a variety of public address instructional methods.[2] In an attempt to explore new approaches to public address instruction, we have found that the competency-based approach fits student needs while allowing us to achieve the traditional goals of our discipline.

Public address instructors face a variety of obstacles. First, most undergraduate students are unfamiliar with speech analysis and historical material of a specific nature. While most undergraduate students are introduced to survey history courses, public address classes typically require a familiarity with specific periods and persons. Consequently,

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1 Ann Q. Staton-Spicer and Ronald E. Bassett, "A Mastery Learning Approach to Competency-Based Education for Public Speaking Instruction," Communication Education, 29 (May 1980), pp. 171-182; Gayle K. Levison, "The Basic Speech Communication Course: Establishing Minimal Oral Competencies and Exemption Procedures," Communication Education, 25 (September 1976), pp. 222-230.

2 For example, see Waldo W. Braden, "Public Address as a Humane Study," Speech Teacher, 23 (March 1974), pp. 109-114.

if students lack a familiarity with a period to be studied, instructors in public address find that much of their time is directed toward re-introducing students to historical background and personalities to provide the needed perspective for understanding the course.

Second, many undergraduate students taking communication courses have acquired basic skills in public communication, interpersonal communication, or group communication, but lack training in rhetorical criticism skills. If the undergraduate enters the public address course without a background in the basics of rhetorical criticism, the public address instructor either spends a portion of class time on rhetorical criticism principles and practice, or lets students develop their critical skills independently or haphazardly.

Finally, the instructor is handicapped often by the lack of current public address publications and collections. Frequently, the instructor is forced to draw upon materials that are difficult to obtain or out-of-print sources to provide students with speeches and a communication-oriented interpretation of a historical period. Therefore, instructors have to be skilled in a variety of instructional course development techniques to resolve these problems. While we do not offer the competency-based approach as a panacea, we feel the approach as we have adapted it is useful in a variety of situations and can be suited to individual teaching styles. We feel the competency-based approach not only reduces some of the problems we face as public address instructors, but also increases student involvement and learning.

The competency-based learning approach as applied to public address instructional development helped us to achieve the following five goals:

1. TO ENABLE STUDENTS TO GRASP THE HISTORY OF THE PERIOD UNDER STUDY.

Through this approach, we were able to pinpoint specifically the historical events that we determined were relevant to the student's understanding of the period. While we recognized that other material might be used and suggested additional sources to our students, the approach helped us to select only the historical material that would be intellectually essential for the student to comprehend the period.

2. TO ENABLE STUDENTS TO DEVELOP AND APPLY RHETORICAL CRITICISM SKILLS.

Through the use of the competency-based approach, we were able to identify skills that the student-as-critic should develop in order to become competent. Through specifically selected readings, practice, and lecture materials, those skills were stressed as essential for competent criticism. Since students were writing and conducting original research, confidence in their scholarly abilities increased.

3. TO PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH A COURSE FORMAT OF HIGH INTEREST VALUE.

Use of a competency-based instructional approach did not limit or restrict the development of instructional materials designed to complement unit and course goals; rather, it fostered experimentation with techniques to maintain student involvement with less familiar material.

4. TO ENABLE STUDENTS TO PERCEIVE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HISTORY AND RHETORIC.

The competency-based approach allowed us to develop materials that directly related the study of speeches to the understanding of historical events and actions.[3]

5. TO ALLOW STUDENTS TO DEVELOP RESEARCH SKILLS USEFUL FOR STUDYING OTHER HISTORICAL PERIODS.

The competency-based approach aided us as we isolated specific research and critical skills. In the development of these skills, our students engaged in historical research and frequently consulted original source materials. Our emphasis on research skills stimulated student pride in their work and introduced them to research processes which are transferrable to other periods of study.

II

Briefly, a competency-based learning approach involved the determining of objectives, defining the learning skill involved, and setting the teaching plan.[4]

Some of the most frequent criticisms of objectives are that they are constraining, time-consuming, irrelevant, and that they

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[3] As James R. Andrews observed, a rhetorical view of history will aid in understanding "not only the reciprocal shaping of rhetoric and events, but the impact of events-as-perceived on the course of history." James R. Andrews, "The Passionate Negation: The Chartist Movement in Rhetorical Perspective," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 59 (April 1973), p. 208.

[4] Robert F. Mager, Preparing Instructional Objectives, 2nd ed. (Belmont, California: Fearon, 1975); Donald J. Cegala, Robert J. Kibler, Larry L. Barker and David T. Miles, "Writing Behavioral Objectives: A Programmed Article," Speech Teacher, 21 (September 1972), pp. 151-168.

obscure the learning process.[5] While we feel that the type of objective and the degree of specificity is an individual choice, objectives are important. They provide a basis for material selection, clarify instructor expectations, and enable students to focus their efforts. For example, in developing tests, unless objectives are clearly and firmly fixed in the minds of both parties, tests may be at best misleading; at worst, irrelevant, unfair, and uninformative.

Objectives can be used on a variety of levels and can range from daily, unit, and overall course objectives according to instructor need and preference. Most importantly, we found that objectives provided our course development with direction; we were forced to examine and select potential instructional materials with greater concern for student learning.

The instructor must keep in mind that there are several ways to describe types of learning. One system is Bloom's Taxonomy which details the categories of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.[6] Another approach is the Cumulative Learning Model.[7] In our course, we used a combination of both approaches. For example, many of our overall objectives followed Bloom's Taxonomy, but we found the Cumulative Learning Model helpful for structuring daily lectures. There are five learning structures defined in

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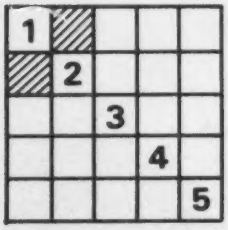
[5] Jean M. Civikly in "A Case for Humanizing Behavioral Objectives," Communication Education, 25 (September 1976), pp. 231-236, suggested two remedies for the problems of depersonalization and rigidity.

[6] David R. Krathwohl, Benjamin S. Bloom, and Bertram B. Masia, Taxonomy of Educational Goals, Handbook II: Affective Domain, (New York: David McKay Co., 1964) and Robert M. Gagne, The Conditions of Learning, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1956).

[7] Ivor K. Davies, Competency Based Learning: Technology, Management, and Design, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), see pp. 92-96.

LEARNING STRUCTURE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE	TEACHING TACTIC	EFFECT OF PRACTICE
Principle	Relates two or more concepts--student generalizes about the relationship of the concepts	Irish resisted British control British saw Irish as inferior	1) Give overview of principle 2) Establish chain 3) Practice chain	Important (marked resistance to forgetting)
⇧				
Concept	Generalization about a class of related phenomena--student classifies in terms of common abstract properties	O'Connell created a cohesive audience, gave a national character to Irish politics, worked in constitutional guidelines	1) Make stimuli and responses distinctive 2) Present all signals/chains to be generalized 3) Force student to generalize or classify conditions 4) Cause student to discriminate between confusing concepts	Little Importance (marked resistance to forgetting)
⇧				
Multiple discriminations	Distinguish one category from another--student identifies each category	Emmet committed to violent methods; O'Connell to non-violent methods	1) Make stimuli and responses as distinctive as possible 2) Force student to discover discrimination 3) Rehearse discrimination to overcome interference	Little Importance (little resistance to forgetting)
⇧				
Chain	Fixed sequence of verbal responses--student must know component signals	Catholic Emancipation promised but not enacted. O'Connell felt justified in leading his agitation	1) Give overview of chain 2) Establish chain 3) Practice chain	Important (little resistance to forgetting)
⇧				
Signal	Conditional response; student makes specific response to specific stimulus	O'Connell is non-violent O'Connell picture	1) Give stimulus and cause response 2) Reinforce for correct response 3) Shape responses toward mastery 4) Practice responses	Important (resistance to forgetting)

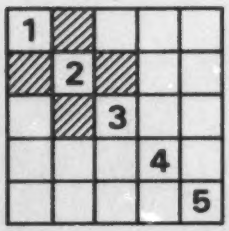
TABLE ONE



A SIGNAL

Rule 1. Daniel O'Connell was non-violent.

Rule 2. Daniel O'Connell employed rallies and mass meetings.

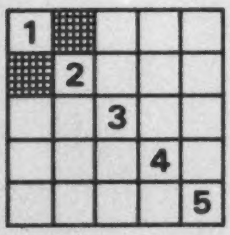


A CHAIN

Rule 1. Catholics were second-class citizens before the Union.

Rule 2. Catholic Emancipation was promised in the Act of Union, but not enacted.

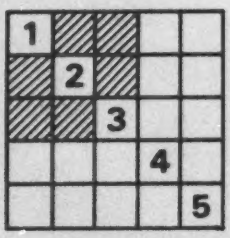
Rule 3. O'Connell felt justified in leading his agitation for Catholic Emancipation.



A MULTIPLE-DISCRIMINATION

Rule 1. Robert Emmet was committed to using violent methods.

Rule 2. Daniel O'Connell used non-violent methods.



CONCEPT: Daniel O'Connell created a cohesive audience.

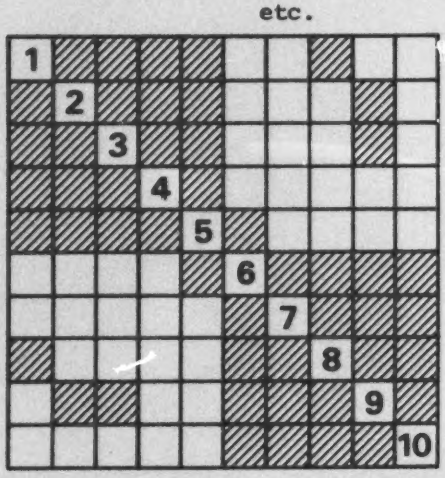
Rule 1. O'Connell's Catholic Association appealed to many Irish groups.

Rule 2. O'Connell used mass meetings and rallies to convey his messages.

Rule 3. O'Connell used strong language to reawaken Irish nationalist sentiments.

etc.

(Concept 1)



PRINCIPLE: The British saw Irish as inferior.

Concept 1. The Act of Union perpetuated British ascendency. (1-5)

Concept 2. Harsh coercion legislation characterized the British response to Irish rebellions in the 19th century. (6-10)

(Concept 2)

FIGURE ONE

this particular model: signal learning, chain learning, multiple discrimination, concept formation, and principle formation. Table 1 provides a further illustration of the Cumulative Learning Model.

An excellent way to appreciate what is meant by signals, chains, multiple-discriminations, concepts, and principles is to be able to visualize them through such a technique as matrix analysis. As developed by Thomas, Davies, Openshaw, and Bird, matrix analysis records relationships between ideas. To begin, we outlined our course material in single idea form. Ideas were arranged in the order of intended presentation. The process of matrix analysis allowed us to see whether our proposed course material was purposeful. Figure 1 illustrates the various types of relationships outlined by matrix analysis.

Davies suggests that ideas or 'rules' be numbered in serial order and written along a diagonal line of squares on a sheet of graph paper, beginning at the top left-hand corner and finishing at the bottom right-hand corner of the matrix. The next step is to record the relationships between the ideas on the diagonal or 'definition line.' For example, rule one is compared with rule two. If a relationship is found to exist between two rules, this is recorded on the matrix by shading in the appropriate cells according to a pre-determined key.[8] If a relationship

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[8] Davies, pp. 94-95. We followed the recording pattern suggested by Davies. For example, if a relationship exists between rule 1 and rule 2, it must exist also for rule 2 and rule 1. Therefore, the relationship is plotted once above the definition line and once below it.

does not exist, another rule must be inserted between the two non-related rules to establish a relationship, or the instructor may determine that the rule was not essential. The aim is to record only those relationships necessary for the student to achieve the objective. The matrix plot provides a visual analysis of the material and points to the type of learning structure, which in turn, determines the teaching tactic.

In sum, it is important to recognize that a reciprocal relationship exists between course objectives, material selection, learning structures, and teaching tactics. A common complaint is that public address students are familiar with speeches and with specialized periods of history, but are unable to grasp the relationship between the two. Using the matrix analysis technique, we found several key concepts which unified and carried through the entire course. Students were able to relate a large framework to smaller units of study; a relationship such as this unified the course and aided students in attaining various levels of learning.[9]

III

To illustrate the previous discussion of objectives and matrix analysis, we will use excerpts from a unit focussing on Daniel O'Connell and his campaign for Catholic Emancipation in Ireland. The unit objectives were:

1. Identify the orator, Daniel O'Connell.
2. Identify the event, Catholic Emancipation.
3. Identify the methods used by O'Connell to create a cohesive audience.
4. Develop analytical skills by reading, discussing, and evaluating a speech by O'Connell on Catholic Emancipation.
5. Understand the relationship of rhetoric and events by discussing the inter-relationship of O'Connell, his oratory, persuasive techniques, audiences, and the success of his Emancipation campaign.

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[9] Robert F. Mager and Kenneth M. Beach, Jr., Developing Vocational Instruction, (Belmont, California: Fearon, 1967).

Note that the unit objectives follow Bloom's Taxonomy.

In the preparation of a particular section for matrix analysis, however, the Cumulative Learning Model can be used. The following example illustrates the types of relationships between ideas that can be depicted on the matrix. Four rules provide an appropriate vehicle for our purpose.

Rule 1: One of the problems the early Irish leaders were unable to overcome was a lack of informed and unified public opinion in Ireland.

Rule 2: An early Irish leader, Robert Emmet, was not able to unify Irish public opinion and consequently, his 1803 rebellion failed.

Rule 3: Daniel O'Connell informed and unified public opinion by creating a cohesive audience.

Rule 4: The British saw O'Connell's leadership, popularity with the masses, and creation of a positive public opinion in Ireland as threatening.

There are two basic relationships portrayed on the matrix. In relationships of association (as in rules 1 and 2), two rules have some element or identity in common. In relationships of discrimination (as in rules 2 and 3), two rules have a difference or point of revealing contrast. In any relationship of discrimination, a relationship of association is apparent, but it is the dissimilarity that forms the essential teaching or learning point.[10] Figure 2 provides an illustration of how the two relationships of association and discrimination can be seen in the four rules intended for matrix analysis.

In the illustration above, rule 1 identified a major concept of the course. Rule 2 showed association between rules 1 and 2. Rule 3

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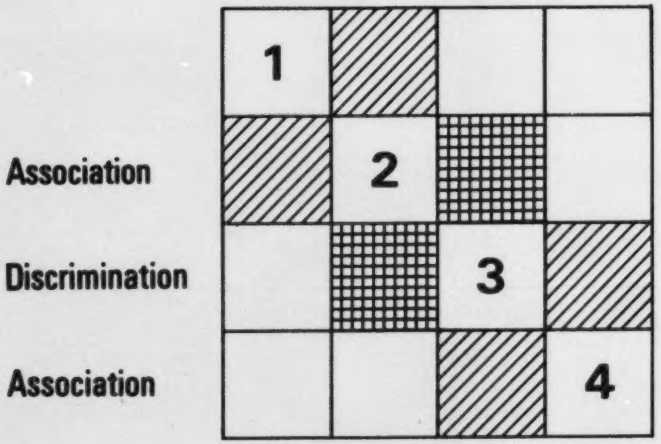
[10] Davies, pp. 94-95.



Rule 1. Early Irish leaders were unable to unify a disparate public.

Rule 2. Robert Emmet was unable to unify public opinion.

Rule 3. Daniel O'Connell informed and unified public opinion.

Rule 4. The British saw O'Connell's success as threatening.

FIGURE TWO

discriminated between rules 1 and 2. Rule 4, while specific to O'Connell, was a recurring major concept - the British saw the Irish, when unified, as a threat. Through our purposeful design of materials, the unity of the course enabled students to link signals, chains, and multiple discriminations to concepts and principles. Relationships between ideas became more readily apparent as students were able to associate them to a larger framework.

After the learning structures and relationships have been plotted on a matrix, the appropriate teaching strategy is considered. For example, the fact that Robert Emmet did not unify Irish public opinion requires the use of memory and practice, but once mastered, the student is able to progress to making more advanced relationships. Everytime such signals can be linked to an overall concept such as "Irish leaders were not able to overcome the problem of an uninformed and divided public," student retention is increased.

Discrimination also plays a critical role in the learning process.[11] Emphasizing the discriminations involved in a learning task often can shorten the amount of time necessary to comprehend the material. Discrimination between O'Connell and Emmet requires less effort from the student than memorizing the separate signals that Emmet did not unify Irish public opinion and that O'Connell did unify public opinion. Therefore, students are more likely to remember what has been determined initially as important through the instructor's appropriate selection of teaching tactics to

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[11] Davies, pp. 94-97.

reinforce learning structures.

Teaching techniques are developed to complement the type of learning desired. One teaching strategy was the creation of speaker "resumes." To encourage student learning, a picture of the orator was included in the upper corner of the "resume." The "resume" also included a summary of a speaker's background, rhetorical skills, and attitudes toward the Irish-English conflict. Slides[12] of orators and historical events further emphasized student identification of speakers and events. Transparencies of political cartoons from English and Irish political magazines illustrated how speakers were perceived differently by the English and Irish publics. Irish folk songs and rebellion songs of the nineteenth century provided useful information about Irish and English attitudes and historical events.

Speech analysis assignments and discussion questions on speeches and historical events aided students in identifying speakers and events, recognizing the relationship between events and speeches, and developing critical skills and a rhetorical perspective. During the course, students surveyed representative speeches and were required to complete written evaluations on a critical form. Students also wrote a final paper in which they combined skills in historical research and rhetorical criticism. To demonstrate how the speech or speeches examined were reflective of attitudes, ideas, or perceptions of the period and to inter-relate events with rhetoric were the two primary focusses of student final papers.

Quiz questions were given at the end of each unit to test major concepts, signals, discriminations, chains, and principles. For example, such questions

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[12] For further information, see William Seiler, "Audiovisual Materials in Classroom Instruction: A Theoretical Approach," Speech Teacher, 21 (September 1972), pp. 197-204.

as the following were asked: "How was O'Connell's agitation different from Emmet's and other early Irish rebellions?" and "How did O'Connell create a cohesive audience?" The quiz questions then became a source for the final exam.

With the competency-based approach, it is essential for some form of evaluation to be made to gauge the effectiveness of the course design and teaching tactics in achieving objectives. We want to stress the need for evaluation of material and techniques as a final step in using this approach. Evaluations can be designed individually and we found the use of an outside instructional development team helpful in this aspect.[13] In our case, student reactions and level of achievement were high, but other factors (low student-teacher ratio, our enthusiasm, and the effort we made in compiling original materials) may have contributed to this result. The students exceeded our expectations with regard to the amount of material learned and the degree of sophistication in speech analysis. As we offer this course in the future and structure others in a similar manner, we will obtain additional evaluative information.

IV

We feel the competency-based approach has a great potential for use in the study of public address. The approach does not demand that instructors drastically change teaching styles. Instead, it allows an instructor to employ traditional methods, but with a new perspective. For example, many public address courses require student reports on outstanding orators. These

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[13] We appreciate the efforts of Ken Carlisle from the Indiana University Division of Development and Special Projects.

reports may range from excellent to deficient. Students, who hear three reports on three different individuals in a class period, may be left with three disparate impressions. Using the matrix system, the instructor would determine within the overall course structure perhaps two or three major ideas that should be emphasized in a report on a particular individual or event. Your instruction to the student might be to prepare a 15 minute report on Robert Emmet, which would include a comparison with earlier Irish revolutionaries and analyze how his final speech fits the genre of gallows speeches.

This process gives guidance to the student preparing the report. Knowing what materials to emphasize, the student feels confident that this information will be valuable to his/her fellow students and has a sense of accomplishment that this report fits into the overall course. You, the instructor, have a greater chance of obtaining material that fits your instructional goals. You give guidance to the student preparing the report, and the rest of the class benefits accordingly since the reports are conceptually linked to each other and to course goals.

We found that the competency-based approach gives students confidence and enables them to move beyond memorization of materials to an analysis and evaluation of the relationship of rhetoric and events. The approach incorporates relevant instructional techniques based on learning behavior. In our course, application of these techniques enabled students to learn and retain a large amount of previously unfamiliar material. The approach can be tailored to meet individual instructor teaching styles, but requires a willingness on the part of the instructor to devote time and energy to course

development.

Competency-based planning makes a course attractive to students because it is complete, unified, and organized. Both students and instructor have clearly defined goals and are pursuing the most effective means to achieve competency over the course materials. Competency, however, is the minimum degree of achievement, for instructor and student motivation determines the level of individual achievement.